

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening, and thank you all for being here tonight for our National Day Reception and birthday celebration for His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Japan. The Emperor will be 80 years old on the 23rd of this month, and we pray for his continuing good health.

Again this year, I am greatly appreciative of each of you, for your absolute dedication toward building strong connections between Japan and the Rocky Mountain region. The past year has truly been an eventful one in the growth of our relations. Of course, at the top of the list is the inauguration of daily nonstop flight service between Denver and Tokyo, begun by United Airlines in June. The flight has made a good showing so far, and this direct connection with Japan truly brings great potential benefits to our relations.

This nonstop flight is used consistently not just by people from the Rocky Mountains, but by passengers from across the United States who transfer at DIA and fly to Japan. The reverse is also true, as we know that many passengers from Japan transfer in Denver and go on to their final destination. The vision of this is exciting, and means that Denver has become a great gateway between the United States and Japan.

One of the most important pillars of Japan's foreign policy is the strengthening of the Japan-U.S. Alliance. At the bilateral summit meeting held during Prime Minister Abe's visit to the United States last February, our two leaders had successful discussions on the future reinforcement of our alliance and building on the bonds of friendship and trust between our two countries. I would like to stress that the Japan-U.S. Alliance is actually the linchpin of Japan's diplomacy and security, and strengthening that is indispensable in responding to severe regional security environments and various threats around the world.

In this respect, it is really very meaningful for us that the Rocky Mountain region has become a gateway to the United States for Japanese people. I and all of our Consulate staff members are very happy to throw our energies toward strengthening Japan-U.S. relations, in cooperation with the many wonderful American friends of Japan in this area. I would again, on this occasion, like to express my heartfelt gratitude to so many who helped to bring the new Tokyo flight to Denver, including Mayor Michael Hancock of the great city of Denver, and his staff.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the distance now shrinking like this between Japan and the Rocky Mountain

region, we have confidence and great expectations that a corresponding expansion of cultural and economic relations is happening. In Japan itself, it is noteworthy that significant fundamental changes are going on that can have a great influence and positive impact on our alliance. As part of the Asia-Pacific region, Japan and the United States together form the growth center of the world, accounting for about 30% of global economic output. We share the same values of freedom, basic human rights, and the rule of law. It is historically inevitable that our two countries should come together now to help create the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, or "TPP". From this bigger perspective too, then, it seems that now is a fortunate time to focus on expanding our economic relations between Japan and the Rocky Mountain region.

Needless to say, the powerful friendship between Japan and the United States is grounded in human relations. Last June, a mission from Denver including Mayor Hancock visited Japan with the inaugural nonstop flight to Tokyo. They were welcomed very warmly, and were very successful in expanding their human network with the Japanese community. Also this year, over one hundred young Japanese high school and junior high students visited Colorado, Wyoming and Utah, with nearly the same number of American kids visiting Japan in return, under youth exchange programs operated by the Japanese Government. I am very proud of these wonderful human relations between Japan and the Rocky Mountain region, and am committed to developing the connections even more. Especially such youth exchange projects, which are so valuable for the future.

Finally, I would like to touch on the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020. We are already moving into preparations right away to ensure the success of the Games, and I can assure you that we will welcome overseas athletes and visitors with the best of Japanese hospitality OMOTENASHI. Especially all of you from Colorado and the Rocky Mountain area that have the chance, using the nonstop flight to Tokyo!

Once again, thank you very much for your attention and for being here tonight. The Consulate-General of Japan in Denver is committed to cooperation with you in promoting mutual understanding between Japan and our Rocky Mountain area, in a variety of ways. I look forward to closely working with you all, toward that great purpose.

Please enjoy the evening and this gathering of wonderful friends. Thank you.